# When You're on the Pill...

## Other drugs may cause problems.

With perfect use, oral contraceptives are an impressive 99.9 percent effective. Factor in human error, however, and that number drops to 95 percent. The biggest blunder women make is not taking their pills correctly and consistently—every day at the same time each day.

Yet there's more than just skipping a pill or two that can lead to an unwanted pregnancy. "The effectiveness of the Pill is reduced for people taking anticonvulsant medications and those taking certain antibiotics, such as rifampin," says James Trussell, Ph.D., director of the office of population research at Princeton University in New Jersey. A few experts believe that more commonly prescribed antibiotics such as ampicillin and tetracycline may also interfere with the Pill. Women taking these medications may be advised to switch to a higher dose of the Pill or to use a second method, such as a condom or diaphragm, as backup.

Check with your doctor if you're concerned about drug interactions.

To prevent missing a pill, establish a consistent daily routine. Doctors advise taking the Pill the same time every day. —JACQUELINE STENSON

### Potential Pill Sappers

Use backup contraception or consult your doctor before taking any of the following drugs:

- **Antibiotics**—penicillin, rifampin, tetracycline
- **Antifungal medication**—griseofulvin
- **Anticonvulsant medications**—phenytoin, phenobarbital, primidone, carbamazepine, ethosuximide

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# Scary Symptoms

## Don't worry. They're (usually) nothing to worry about.

**Not all scary symptoms need send us rushing to the doctor's office in a cold sweat. Sometimes the foods we eat or the stress in our lives can cause significant bodily changes that are harmless and temporary. However, if a particular symptom persists or worsens, you should check with your physician.** —JACQUELINE STENSON

| Symptom | When it's harmless | Cautions |
|---|---|---|
| SPOTTING | During ovulation. Harmless light bleeding can occur on the day of ovulation if your uterine lining is sensitive to declining estrogen levels at mid-cycle. You might also experience some "breakthrough" bleeding if you've just started taking the Pill or switched brands of birth-control pills. | Consult your doctor if you experience prolonged spotting or heavy bleeding, especially if you suspect you might be pregnant. |
| PAINFUL BREASTBONE | After you've been lying on your stomach for long periods of time. This may cause some soreness to the breastbone. | Consult a doctor if the pain feels like it involves the chest and not just the bone. |
| LOW BLOOD PRESSURE | It's normal for some people to have low blood pressure, and it's actually easier on their cardiovascular system. | See a doctor if you get dizzy or light-headed when you stand up. |
| DISCOLORED STOOLS | Certain medications, such as Pepto-Bismol, and foods, such as iron supplements and beets, can discolor stools. | Blood in the stools or recurring discolored stools should be checked by a doctor. |
| SLEEPLESSNESS | On occasion, the worries of life are bound to keep many of us up at night. | Consult your doctor if it persists. Insomnia can have many causes, including certain medications and mood disorders. |

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